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<i>President:</i>	Mr. Van Oosterom	(Netherlands)
<i>Members:</i>	Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Mr. Inchauste Jordán
	China	Mr. Wu Haitao
	Côte d'Ivoire	Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue
	Equatorial Guinea	Mr. Ndong Mba
	Ethiopia	Mr. Alemu
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Kazakhstan	Mr. Tumysh
	Kuwait	Mr. Alotaibi
	Peru	Mr. Tenya
	Poland	Ms. Wronecka
	Russian Federation	Mr. Polyanskiy
	Sweden	Mr. Skoog
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Allen
	United States of America	Mr. Green

Agenda

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning the Democratic Republic of the Congo

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to participate in this meeting.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in today's meeting: Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator; Ms. Jeanine Bandu Bahati, Coordinator of the Encadrement des Femmes Indigènes et des Ménages Vulnérables; and Abbé Donatien Nshole, Secretary-General of the Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

Recalling the Security Council's latest note 507 on its working methods (S/2017/507), I wish to encourage all participants, members and non-members of the Council alike, to deliver their statements in five minutes or less. Note 507 also encourages briefers to be succinct and to focus on key issues. Briefers are encouraged to limit initial remarks to 15 minutes or less.

I now give the floor to Mr. Lowcock.

Mr. Lowcock: The picture I am holding shows Mwasi Kallunga and her seven children, including her 18-month-old baby, Shabani. Members of the Council all have the picture in front of them. They can see that little Shabani has the distended belly of many malnourished children. I met them last Tuesday in Katanika camp, in Kalemie, in the stunning and rich landscape surrounding Lake Tanganyika in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Mwasi's husband and two of her nine children were killed when her village, 50 kilometres away, was attacked and burnt down by militiamen in January. They fled, walked for two straight days and now live in squalid conditions under a plastic sheet in a tiny so-called shelter in a congested, cramped, unsanitary, hilly camp at constant risk of fire and flood. Her children can no longer go to school. Her entire family — traumatized, sobbing

and destitute — are too terrified to contemplate returning home.

Mwasi and her children are among the 4.5 million people displaced right now in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Humanitarian needs caused by internal conflict have doubled over the past year. Thirteen million people need humanitarian assistance. More than 4.6 million children are acutely malnourished, including 2.2 million suffering severe acute malnutrition. We are seeing mushrooming epidemics including the worst outbreak of cholera in 15 years.

There is also an epidemic of sexual violence, most of it unreported and unaddressed, and much of it against children. I am glad that Jeanine Bandu Bahati has joined us as a brifer and to see Julienne Lusenge, a strong and courageous defender of women's rights and an activist against sexual violence, in the Chamber among the guests. Almost 746,000 Congolese have fled to neighbouring countries, while the Democratic Republic of the Congo itself hosts more than 540,000 refugees. Without a halt to the violence and a successful political transition, these numbers will all increase.

What Minister Sigrid Kaag of the Kingdom of the Netherlands — with whom I travelled — and I saw last week requires our urgent action. There is despair, but there is also hope. The people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo are resilient and resourceful. I am very impressed by the selfless solidarity of many Congolese families. They have so little, yet they welcome their brothers and sisters from within and outside the country into their homes when those people are displaced by violence.

Without humanitarian assistance, things would be much worse. In 2017, the United Nations and its humanitarian partners reached more than 4.2 million people with life-saving protection and aid. This year, we aim to reach 10.5 million. To scale up the response, we have reinforced our leadership, strengthened our field presence and stepped up our advocacy. Humanitarian agencies continue to deliver despite persistent insecurity and bureaucratic impediments. There have been kidnappings and hijackings of aid workers in recent weeks in Tanganyika.

I had constructive discussions with the authorities on tackling these challenges and on how the Government can fulfil its responsibility for the provision of services and protection to the affected population, and on what they can do to facilitate humanitarian access through

the quicker issuance of visas and lower tariffs, fees and faster customs clearance for aid supplies. Minister Kaag and I also witnessed the signing of a cooperation agreement in Tanganyika between the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator and the provincial Governor to reduce local taxes and fees for humanitarian assistance. The Government in Kinshasa told us that it would support similar agreements in other provinces.

I also want to emphasize the importance of the work of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is creating space for humanitarian delivery and protecting civilians. Things would unquestionably be much worse without the Mission.

Underfunding is the single largest impediment to the humanitarian response in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This year, our appeal requires \$1.7 billion — nearly four times what we secured last year. The Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates, the European Union and the United Nations will, on 13 April, co-host in Geneva the first-ever high-level humanitarian conference on the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The goal is to secure immediate and substantial financial contributions and to launch a multi-year campaign in support of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I ask Council members today to ensure that the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is on the agenda of their Governments and to encourage high-level participation and pledges on 13 April.

We also need solutions to address the root causes of the worsening crisis, including by making progress on the political front and fair elections. We need the Democratic Republic of the Congo's neighbours to behave responsibly as well. While the violence persists, all parties must take steps to protect civilians and civilian infrastructure, in line with their obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law.

Progress in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is possible. Over the 15 years since I first visited the country, infrastructure in many major cities has improved, access to education has increased, child mortality rates have fallen and immunization rates have increased. We need to strengthen our support to the Congolese people.

For Mwasi, the local Government and humanitarian agencies provide aid for her survival. Her new

neighbours help with food for the children when they can. I asked her about her hopes for the future. She wants to be resettled, given a small plot of land to farm, and get her children back into school. It is not much to ask for, is it?

The President: I thank Mr. Lowcock for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Jeanine Bandu Bahati.

Ms. Bandu Bahati (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the Netherlands for inviting me to this very important meeting on the political and humanitarian situation of women and girls in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, because the voice of rural women is not often listened to.

I am a rural woman and the coordinator of the local women's non-governmental organization, Encadrement des Femmes Indigènes et des Ménages Vulnérables (EFIM), based in Goma, North Kivu province, in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo. Today I speak as a rural woman, a peasant woman, a grass-roots woman, a displaced woman, a woman affected by conflict and especially armed conflict.

My organization EFIM engages in the promotion of peace, gender equality and development; in the prevention of armed and community conflicts; and in the protection of women and girl victims of violence. Our vision is to strengthen community mechanisms that protect children and women and promote human rights, focusing on peaceful coexistence among communities, the promotion of peace and the sustainable development of my province. This morning, there are three issues I would like to raise with the Council: the security and humanitarian situation of women; the deterioration of the socioeconomic situation of women and girls; and the political participation of women.

First, the security and humanitarian situation of women in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is increasingly deteriorating. It is tragic, catastrophic and chaotic. The majority of those affected — especially those living in rural areas where we work — are traumatized and live without hope for the future. The situation has been growing worse every year for more than two decades.

There are myriad kinds of violations among the salient problems negatively affecting and weakening populations, and which are particularly experienced by women and girls in Democratic Republic of the

Congo, especially in the east. These include massacres, bloodshed, murders and killings, temporary and permanent displacement, rape and sexual exploitation, kidnapping for ransom, human trafficking, houses burned to the ground, activism, the proliferation of local and foreign armed groups, the looting of natural resources, in particular from the mining and agricultural sectors from which they could benefit, restrictions to rural activities, insufficient incentives to facilitate the participation and schooling of women and girls, the possession of illicit weapons by several people and humanitarian disaster. Such violations have led to increased poverty, unemployment, chronic vulnerability, rural exodus, psychological trauma, weapons proliferation, and so on. It is a time bomb that will result in the extermination of women and girls and of the entire population if no effective grassroots measures are taken to prevent, protect and support women and girls.

By way of example, last month, 54-year-old Ms. Maombi, displaced and very vulnerable, with nine children in her charge, was assaulted and shot by armed men when she went to her field to reap crops. Her daughter, who was under 18, was with her. She was abducted, raped and returned a few days later. Another woman, Dorothée, who witnessed the attack, stated:

"I was in my field. Attackers came and looted goods, burned houses and killed women and men in my presence. They kidnapped four children — two boys and two girls. I am now taking care of a baby left behind".

It should be noted that international aid workers in our areas of intervention are also the victims of attack.

Secondly, the deterioration of the socioeconomic situation of women and girls is also one of the major consequences of the humanitarian crisis that stems from myriad chronic insecurity-related tensions. I am referring here to North Kivu, but I should point out that the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as a whole, is affected and almost engulfed by the scourge. With less than a dollar a day, it is almost impossible to live in other areas. It is an intolerable situation for women and girls. What is worse is that they spend entire days with nothing to eat. Such extreme poverty deprives them, men and boys, of prospects and opportunities, which leads some young people to join armed groups and perpetrate other abuses. I know a widow who, before the war, would sell her goods in several markets. She

was well-off, but due to the insecurity, she was robbed and became very poor and vulnerable. She can no longer feed her children or take care of her family. That is just one example among many.

Finally, the level of women's political participation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains low for several reasons. First, the new electoral law is not conducive to the participation of women and girls. Secondly, few political parties are created by women. Thirdly, very few women are appointed to leadership positions in decision-making entities and women's organizations, in particular at the local level. With regard to North Kivu, there are no women in leadership positions in any of the six territories and three cities. Despite all current and past efforts, women's voices are silenced. That, in a few words, describes the ordeal women and girls face in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Notwithstanding the issues listed above, I assure the Council that we have brave, intelligent, capable and competent women. They simply require the Council's support and assistance in order to show what they can do and produce. That is why we ask the international community to support those women, as well as young girls and boys without jobs, doomed to a life of unemployment.

In conclusion, on behalf of my organization, Encadrement des Femmes Indigènes et des Ménages Vulnérables, and of the women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we recommend that the Security Council, the United Nations and its Member States quickly assess security, protection, socioeconomic and political strategies that would help the women, girls and entire population of the Democratic Republic of the Congo; efficiently redefine indicators that can lead to positive change; act promptly and positively to combat impunity; launch an investigation to punish those guilty of the revolting acts being perpetrated throughout my country; protect women so that they can live and work in a safe environment and provide support and assistance to women and women's organizations at the grassroots level that would yield good results that improve their humanitarian, sociopolitical and economic situation.

I thank the Council once again for the honour to speak as a rural woman who endures the ordeals I have described. The women of the Democratic Republic of the Congo want to be taken into consideration, protected, brought to safety and supported. They want

to live with dignity and in decent conditions, with the hope of a better tomorrow. They expect the Council to respond quickly to their cries for help.

The President: I thank Ms. Bandu Bahati for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Nshole.

Mr. Nshole (*spoke in French*): The humanitarian tragedy taking place in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is deteriorating to such a degree that its people wonder if the situation is even being addressed by the international community and by the United Nations. I will provide a brief summary of the humanitarian and security situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, its root causes and the expectations of the Congolese people.

The humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is marked by a surge in violence in Ituri province and a deterioration in North Kivu, South Kivu, Maniema, Tanganyika and Kasai. Since 17 December 2017, the situation in Ituri has been marked by increased violence that quickly spread to several areas and targeted the Hema community. The identity and motivations of the attackers are not known. It is certainly not an inter-ethnic conflict, as we sometimes hear in the media. More than 100 people have been killed and more than 2,000 houses and huts have been burned. Public infrastructure has not been spared; some 100 schools and 5 hospitals, not to mention the Catholic parish of Lita, have been ransacked. Approximately 338,000 displaced people have been registered.

The risk of an outbreak of epidemics due to insufficient sanitary infrastructure is to be feared, especially with the return of rain to the area. The humanitarian needs are enormous and, to date, the response capacity of humanitarian actors has been limited, inter alia, by the difficulties faced by humanitarian workers in reaching the areas of violence. In Kasai, approximately 1.4 million people, more than half of whom are children, have been forced by the Kamwina Nsapu militias to flee their villages and to wander the roads. Many families who have decided to return home following the massacres have been traumatized by the sight of their pillaged villages, destroyed houses and ravaged fields, with nothing left to eat.

In Tanganyika, the humanitarian situation continues to be dominated by the massive displacement of people

following the intercommunal conflict between the Twa pygmies and the Bantus in the Manono and Kabalo territories. The number of displaced people in that part of the country is approximately 200,000. That violence has also affected livelihoods. New waves of internally displaced persons estimated at 105 displaced households, or 525 people, have reached Kalemie since the beginning of February.

The security context in North Kivu has been dominated by repeated attacks by elements suspected to be armed groups of the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), which has led to the deaths of civilians in the Beni territory. Those repeated incursions of armed men have caused serious problems for the protection of civilians.

In South Kivu, the security situation remains very volatile and humanitarian access is precarious owing primarily to the activities of armed groups and militias, including Raia Mutomboki, and clashes with the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo. Several displaced people have fled to the Shabunda territory since February in search of security.

In the former Equateur province, the presence of Central African refugees in the north-east of the province continues to weigh on the host communities, exacerbating the precarious situation of the local populations. Four camps, set up in North Ubangi and South Ubangi provinces by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, provide shelter to more than 100,000 Central African refugees.

Today in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, there are 4.49 million internally displaced persons, according to statistics published by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in late December 2017. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is the African country with the most internally displaced persons, more than 60 per cent of whom are children and 55 per cent of whom reside in just three provinces — 26 per cent in North Kivu, 15 per cent in South Kivu, and 14 per cent in Tanganyika. However, as of 31 December 2017, there were 623,059 Congolese refugees in the neighbouring countries of Angola, Burundi, Uganda, Rwanda, Tanzania and Zambia.

The causes of that tragedy are essentially the unstable and precarious security situation due to the incursions of suspected ADF; the activities of armed groups; interethnic clashes, in particular among the Twa and Bantu communities; and the manipulation

of certain negative forces that are interested in the destabilizing our beloved country, as is the case in Ituri. Furthermore, the sociopolitical and electoral crisis that arose from the failure to hold presidential and legislative elections in accordance with the time frame set out in the Constitution of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the New Year agreement is creating discontent and a vacuum of State authority in certain areas of the country, owing to the lack of legitimacy of the main institutions.

With regard to the expectations of the Congolese people, in the light of the foregoing and in order to prevent the tragic humanitarian situation of the Democratic Republic of the Congo from becoming worse, it is essential for the United Nations to become further involved and urge the Democratic Republic of the Congo to hold proper elections. The Congolese bishops are convinced that only credible, transparent and peaceful elections can give the Congolese people legitimate leaders who are capable of addressing the multifaceted crisis that is ravaging the country. Calls by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) for the full implementation of the provisions of the New Year's agreement, which is a prerequisite for the holding of smooth elections, and compliance with the key dates of the electoral calendar should be the priorities of the day. Any complacency on those issues would be a time bomb, since elections that bring us back to square one would be a waste that the international community must avoid.

The mandate of MONUSCO should be strengthened to provide the Mission with the necessary legal means and equipment to protect civilians, vulnerable people and their property in areas where there are attacks and recurrent violence. Populations that are victims of insecurity and have been forced to flee their land urgently need humanitarian assistance. It is also essential to establish an economic development plan for the Democratic Republic of the Congo following the elections.

The President: I thank Mr. Nshole for his briefing.

I now give the floor to those Council members who wish to make statements.

Mr. Delattre (France) (spoke in French): At the outset, I would like to thank Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs Mark Lowcock, as well as

Ms. Bandu Bahati and Abbé Nshole, for their briefings, which were as poignant as they were enlightening.

I would like to begin by commending the action of the countries of the region, which have demonstrated solidarity commensurate to the challenge posed and bear the primary burden of welcoming Congolese refugees. I also wish to pay tribute to the role of the Congolese themselves, who provide relief and support on a daily basis to the internally displaced persons and refugees arriving in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. More than 11 million people, mostly women and children, are now in forced displacement in the Great Lakes region.

I will not cover the terrible and detailed findings presented by the briefers, which represent a call to action. The question we must answer is: How can we respond and contribute to resolving that crisis?

First, we need to provide immediate financial support. The humanitarian crisis facing the Democratic Republic of the Congo calls for renewed commitment on the part of the partners in order to address it. The donor conference to be held in April in Geneva will, I hope, be an opportunity to provide a resolute response commensurate with the needs of those affected by the crisis.

Secondly, we must also tackle the root causes of the current crisis. In the Kasais, a conflict between a traditional chief and the authorities, which was at first limited, has degenerated and triggered a wide-ranging crisis. In other parts of the country — in Tanganyika, Ituri and the Kivus — local conflicts aggravate or relaunch tragic humanitarian crises. In all such situations of intercommunal conflicts and activities of armed groups, the political factor plays a crucial role and contributes to fuelling tensions that are often linked to the availability of resources. The prospect of presidential, as well as legislative and provincial, elections will make local competition stronger and cause new tensions.

The Congolese Government, which has the primary responsibility for organizing elections, must take the necessary measures to ensure that the conditions for free, open and peaceful elections are in place, starting with the full implementation of the de-escalation measures provided for by the New Year's agreement. It will also be the responsibility of each candidate to ensure that their supporters behave respectfully in the political debate and exercise restraint. These measures

are essential to preventing new clashes and population displacements. They are in line with the objectives of national reconciliation, tolerance and democratization, which are part of the commitments undertaken by the Congolese authorities under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region.

More generally, it is early action through dialogue and mediation missions that will prevent the spiral that has led to the current humanitarian crisis. The United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) has an essential role to play here. The Mission's integrated approach to protecting civilians is designed to address that issue. If properly implemented, the approach can even become a peacekeeping model. A whole-of-mission effort is necessary to prevent conflicts and to be proactive so as to prevent tensions from escalating. The Mission's good offices, supported by a tight community-alert network that enables early identification of potential conflicts, will be particularly crucial this year. France hopes that that aspect of MONUSCO's mandate will be strengthened in the mandate that we adopt by the end of the month.

The two priority missions of MONUSCO — the protection of civilians and election preparation — are inextricably linked and mutually reinforcing. That is why MONUSCO must have access to all necessary means to accomplish its mission. But we must be realistic. MONUSCO cannot do everything alone. Much will depend on how the elections are organized. A peaceful electoral climate, where everyone has confidence in the process and each candidate enjoys free expression, will contribute even more to pacification than anything MONUSCO could do.

I also call on the countries of the region to implement, without delay, the commitments made under the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region. Results must quickly demonstrate those commitments, which were renewed collectively last October.

Mr. Alemu (Ethiopia): The deteriorating political, security and humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is indeed a matter of serious concern. The continued instability in the country has displaced many and caused a major humanitarian crisis that requires serious attention. We thank Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock, Ms. Jeanine Bandu

Bahati and Abbé Donatien Nshole, Secretary-General of the Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo, for their briefings on the latest situation, following the visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo last week by the Dutch Minister and Under-Secretary-General Lowcock.

The current humanitarian emergency in the Democratic Republic of the Congo cannot be seen in isolation from the political and security situation in the country. We believe that the problem requires a long-term and sustainable solution, as stressed by the French representative. The current humanitarian situation is worrying because of the very large affected population, which has reached a record high. We strongly support the call for mobilizing more resources to save lives, particularly vulnerable children and women in the severely affected areas of the country.

We appreciate the efforts of humanitarian actors on the ground who are supporting education, water and sanitation as well as agricultural projects to meet the needs of the displaced people. We are hopeful that the humanitarian donor conference for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to be co-hosted by the European Commission, the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the United Arab Emirates next month in Geneva, will help raise the estimated \$1.7 billion required to address emergency needs in the country, including for the 4.5 million internally displaced people.

It will be very difficult to resolve the humanitarian crisis and the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — the gravity of which has been so ably and passionately described by Ms. Bandu Bahati — without addressing the country's political and security problems. The continued instability in the eastern, southeastern and central parts of Democratic Republic of the Congo continues to displace huge numbers of people.

The implementation of the 31 December 2016 political agreement is absolutely imperative to address the political impasse in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in a consensual and inclusive manner and to ensure the organization of a peaceful, free, fair and credible election. In that connection, we note the measures taken by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo since the announcement of the electoral calendar. However, we believe more needs to be done in terms of confidence-building measures. The fairness and credibility of the election is a very

serious matter, as Abbé Nshole stressed. Of course, the Democratic Republic of the Congo also faces armed groups that are not known for being responsible.

The initiatives of countries of the region and the efforts of the African Union to support the momentum in preparations for the election deserve the support of the international community. Enhancing the coordination of the United Nations, the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other international partners is necessary to facilitate coherent and effective support for the electoral process, which is so critical not only for the peace and security of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but also of the wider Great Lakes region.

Mr. Wu Haitao (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): China wishes to thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing. We have listened to the remarks made by Ms. Bandu Bahati and Mr. Nshole.

Located in the heart of the African continent, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is an important African country. Peace and stability there affect the overall peace of the African continent. Over the past few years, the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has remained complex and grave, characterized in particular by security and humanitarian challenges resulting from ongoing conflicts in some parts of the country, including in the east. In our view, the international community should focus its support and assistance on the following three aspects.

First, it must ensure that the ownership of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in addressing its domestic problems fully respects the country's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. The Government shoulders the primary responsibility for protecting civilians. The international community should support the Government in beefing up its security capacity. The Security Council is now reviewing the mandate renewal for the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO). China supports MONUSCO in continuing to discharge its mandate, but also hopes that it will step up its communication and coordination with the Government and see its relevant mandate reinforced.

Secondly, the international community must steadily advance the domestic political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It should continue

to engage all parties in the country, pushing for the peaceful settlement of differences through political consultation, dialogue and mediation. The African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and other regional and subregional organizations play a major role in mediating the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and merit necessary and continued support from the international community.

Thirdly, the international community should continue to provide the country with humanitarian assistance, helping it to overcome urgent challenges, including food insecurity and internally displaced persons issues.

Having said that, more attention should be paid to helping the country to address economic and social issues by scaling up input in agriculture, education and infrastructure, among other areas, so as to effectively improve the local economic and social development conditions and provide guarantees for the rule of law and lasting peace and stability in the country.

China has all along been steadfast in supporting the peace process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We have been actively engaged in the United Nations peacekeeping mission in the country and have provided the country with humanitarian assistance, including medical supplies and food. We have also assumed an active part in its economic and social development. Alongside the international community, China stands ready to continue playing a constructive role in the achievement of peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Alotaibi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the Netherlands for convening this meeting today to discuss the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as for shedding light on the human suffering there. To that end, the Dutch Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation made a recent visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to see at first hand the humanitarian situation on the ground. We also appreciate the briefings delivered by Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs; Ms. Jeanine Bandu Bahati, Coordinator of the Encadrement des Femmes Indigènes et des Ménages Vulnérables and Abbé Donatien Nshole, Secretary-General of the Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo.

This meeting is important for us in terms of our priorities because of the scale of the humanitarian disaster that we are facing. We constantly stress that of all the topics on the Security Council agenda, the most critical are those directly related to the extent of human suffering. Most of that suffering is the result of a political tug-of-war, the repercussions of which usually endanger the lives of civilians, lead to severe shortages in food and medical supplies and cause low levels of security.

There is no doubt that prevarication in the implementation by the relevant parties of the political agreement that was signed on 31 December 2016, has led to the absence of security and stability and the severe deterioration in the humanitarian situation that we see today. The ongoing struggle among the armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has intensified over the past two years, particularly in the northern parts of the country, and has reached concerning levels. That has directly contributed to the escalation of the humanitarian crisis to catastrophic levels in some areas of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as described in reports issued by international organizations.

Some 13 million citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo rely on humanitarian aid as a main source of sustenance and survival, a 50 per cent increase compared to 2017. Furthermore, 7.7 million people suffer from severe food insecurity, a 30 per cent increase in just one year. More than 2 million children are suffering from acute malnutrition. Therefore, it is no surprise that the humanitarian situation is being described as catastrophic.

If we go back to recent times in 2017, we would note that nearly 2.2 million new internally displaced persons (IDPs) were scattered throughout the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The total number of IDPs has risen to 4.5 million, the largest internally displaced persons on the African continent. Moreover, approximately 680,000 citizens of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, which unfortunately has led to some clear violations of human rights. In this regard, we look forward to the outcome of the high-level humanitarian conference that will be hosted by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and co-organized by the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates and the European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations in Geneva, in order to raise funds to respond to the humanitarian situation in

the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The conference will take place on 13 April.

We fully believe that the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo can be resolved only through a comprehensive political solution, with continued efforts to enhance confidence-building measures, the timely holding of the presidential elections and bringing perpetrators of human rights violations to justice. In this connection, we would like to welcome the measures and actions currently being undertaken by the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to prepare for holding the three elections — presidential, legislative and municipal — on 23 December 2018, in accordance with the elections calendar. However, we hope that we do not have to wait until then to see alleviation in the suffering of the Congolese people, especially since the humanitarian situation is being classified by relief organizations as one of the worst in the world.

In closing, and with regard to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the mandate of which is due to expire at the end of the month, we would like to reaffirm the need to extend that mandate for an additional year. We support the efforts of those working in the Mission because it is an important contribution to the efforts of the Government in preparing for the upcoming political phase. We also note the importance of the continued coordination between the Government and international and regional organizations to support political stability, which is the main component in the alleviation of the suffering of the Congolese people.

Ms. Wronecka (Poland): At the beginning, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for your initiative. I express our gratitude to Under-Secretary-General Mark Lowcock for his very comprehensive briefing.

(spoke in French)

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Ms. Jeanine Bandu Bahati for her contribution, as well as Abbé Donatien Nshole for his briefing, which was quite moving. I thank them both.

(spoke in English)

Poland remains highly concerned by the dramatic deterioration of the humanitarian and security situation of the Congolese people. Yet despite the efforts of the international community, the Government and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the

humanitarian needs have doubled since last year. Poland expresses high concern over the issue. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is recognized, for the second consecutive year, as the country worst affected by conflict-related displacement in the world.

In that context, I would like to underline the importance of the preventive aspect of assistance activities, in particular the need to address the root causes of the conflict and forced displacement. We believe that the holistic approach to preventive actions, including the promotion of dialogue between communities and facilitating community dialogue about conflict, may significantly contribute to easing tensions and improving the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Allow me now to share a few thoughts on humanitarian rights and international humanitarian law.

Widespread violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including targeted attacks against civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian personnel, constitute a protection crisis. The security situation hinders humanitarian access to vulnerable communities. The Congolese authorities have to shoulder the responsibility for normalizing the situation in the country by protecting the fundamental freedoms enshrined in the Constitution and implementing the measures envisaged in the 31 December New Year political agreement.

Cooperation with civil society, in particular with women's representatives, at both national and regional levels is crucial for women. We applaud the courage of 20 million women who, despite poverty and the violence during the registration procedures, queued up to participate in the upcoming elections. We note with concern that women are often targeted in the political process to intimidate female candidates and voters. We are also concerned about the acts of sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which increased by 56 per cent last year. We call on the Government to strengthen measures to improve security, fight impunity for the perpetrators of sexual violence and protect their victims.

The continued conflict and dire humanitarian situation have also had a disproportionate effect on children, 2 million of whom are at risk of starvation. This requires a strong response on the part of the international community. We note with appreciation the continuing progress on the implementation of the

action plan to address grave violations against children, but we still want to stress the importance of putting an immediate stop to all violations of children's rights by State security forces and bringing all perpetrators of such acts to justice, regardless of their affiliation or rank. However, we should not forget that demobilizing children is only a first step. The lack of reintegration options for children who have been demobilized increases the risk of their re-recruitment.

With regard to the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), we would like to reiterate that Poland views the protection of civilians as crucial. That task should therefore remain one of MONUSCO's highest priorities, since the increase in armed violence renders rebuilding a viable political strategy for protecting civilians essential. MONUSCO's contribution to securing civilians' security and creating a space for humanitarian agencies has so far been vital to preventing the current crisis from escalating further. It should not be forgotten that many of the tensions and conflicts at a local level are the result of historically established reasons. The political stakeholders and the international community must make real efforts to address the drivers of these conflicts properly and assure the local communities that they will not be left to solve their problems alone.

In conclusion, we were pleased to note the visit planned by the Secretary-General and the Chairperson of the African Union Commission to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We hope that it will boost the confidence of all the parties involved in supporting that country. We commend the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates and the European Commission for their readiness to hold a donor conference on humanitarian assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The recent cuts to assistance from agencies, owing to the shortage of funding, are extremely worrying and could result in the further escalation of one of the world's most serious humanitarian crises.

Mr. Polyanskiy (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We have taken note of the report by Mr. Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and we are grateful for his informative briefing and those of the other briefers, which were also helpful.

We are concerned about the rapid deterioration in the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is sad that during the past year alone, according to United Nations estimates, we have seen the number of people in need of humanitarian aid grow by 50 per cent, while the cost of the humanitarian response plan for the country has almost doubled. We agree with the view that the reasons for the worsening humanitarian situation lie in the continuing inter-ethnic clashes and the activities of armed groups in the northern and eastern regions of the country. The situation with regard to food security, sanitation and epidemics is particularly worrying. A new wave of refugees will have negative humanitarian consequences both for the Democratic Republic of the Congo's neighbours, many of which are already dealing with acute humanitarian crises, and the Great Lakes region as a whole.

These developments pose new challenges for the humanitarian community that it is unlikely to be able to cope with, considering the current funding available for humanitarian assistance. It will be essential for donors to step up their support for United Nations activities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and its neighbours. For its part, Russia will continue to support such efforts. In particular, we are taking steps to relieve African countries' long-term debt. To date, we have written off more than \$20 billion of underlying debt within the framework of the Heavily Indebted Poor Country Initiative, as well as implementing debt-for-development swaps. We consistently contribute to international assistance programmes for Africa through the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the International Civil Defence Organization, and we also provide aid to the health sector. We were one of the first countries to respond to the Ebola epidemic, contributing more than \$60 million to combating it.

I would like to take this opportunity to express our gratitude to those neighbours of the Democratic Republic of the Congo who have been helping Congolese refugees. We will continue to provide them with appropriate assistance. Last year Russia sent dozens of KAMAZ trucks to Uganda for use in United Nations humanitarian operations there, and we plan to transfer additional transport units for use in Uganda to the WFP this year as well.

With regard to the country's overall situation, we hope that ensuring that the presidential elections

scheduled for 23 December are held on time will help to reduce tensions in Congolese society. We call on the opposition forces to cooperate more actively with the Independent National Electoral Commission, recognize its proposed election dates and to refrain from any acts of violence. We are opposed to any efforts to mentor or impose recipes on Kinshasa regarding election issues. Nor should MONUSCO's role go beyond providing technical and logistical assistance to the national authorities in organizing and conducting the elections.

The primary responsibility for normalizing the situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo belongs to its citizens themselves, and respect for the country's sovereignty is an absolute imperative. We again urge the Blue Helmets to act in accordance with the basic principles of peacebuilding and not to permit any interference in Kinshasa's internal affairs. Any situation in which MONUSCO supports a particular Congolese party is to be avoided at all costs. We assume that the Mission's main function is to stabilize the security situation, which in itself would also help to improve humanitarian access. In that connection, we would like to draw the Council's attention to the renewed activity of illegal armed groups in the eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo, where civilians, Government security forces and peacekeepers are being systematically attacked. We are also concerned about the reports that after years of quiet, inter-tribal conflicts in the north-east of the country have broken out again. Needless to say, we were all concerned about the series of rebel attacks on peacekeepers at the end of last year. All of those factors should be taken into account during the work on the new mandate for the United Nations presence in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We see no justification for the proposals in the Secretary-General's report on the results of the strategic review (S/2017/826) for reducing MONUSCO's implementation of its stabilization efforts and its cooperation with Kinshasa in support of the camp for ex-combatants. It will be impossible to ensure long-term solutions to the problem of armed groups without restoring State authority in the eastern part of the country and resolving the issue of the repatriation of former combatants. The implementation of the protection through projection concept endorsed by the Secretariat will hardly help to strengthen the security of civilians or ensure humanitarian access.

As this meeting, we would also like to take the opportunity to raise the issue of the working methods of the Council. As the discussion has shown, it is hardly worthwhile to discuss the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo separately from the military and political context. We would draw the attention of the Council to the fact that many of the ideas proposed by participants at today's meeting were also heard at the meeting on 7 March (see S/PV.8198). In that regard, we believe that it is important to prevent briefings that largely overlap in order not to reduce the effectiveness of the Council's work.

Mr. Tenya (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): We appreciate the convening of this meeting. We thank Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs; Ms. Jeanine Bandu Bahati, Coordinator of the Encadrement des Femmes Indigènes et des Ménages Vulnérables, and Abbé Nshole, Secretary-General of the Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo, for their briefings on the tragic humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Peru follows with particular concern the serious situation in which millions of Congolese people and refugees from neighbouring countries find themselves. Violence, food insecurity and budgetary limitations for humanitarian assistance have led to the largest number of displaced people in the world today. Women, girls and boys are particularly vulnerable.

We welcome the steps taken by the Congolese Government to establish a legal framework for the protection of internally displaced persons, including by completing the internal process for the ratification of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa. We therefore encourage that it be promptly deposited with the African Union Commission. We hope that that will be reflected in the necessary respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of the human rights of millions of people. In addition, we encourage the holding of fair, transparent and credible elections.

Attention should also be paid to the situation of the Congolese displaced to neighbouring countries, such as Burundi, Tanzania and Uganda, who are forced to flee and to seek refuge due to the increasing violence in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Those people must be guaranteed safe passage and access to humanitarian assistance.

Peru believes that it is essential that the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo continue to support the various humanitarian actors through logistical assistance and access to difficult areas in order for them to be able to carry out their work and for a greater number of people to have access to humanitarian aid.

We are particularly concerned about the increased vulnerability of 7 million Congolese women and girls in need of urgent protection and humanitarian assistance. We regret that that number has increased by 50 per cent over the past year. Child sex work and human trafficking must be rejected and addressed. We are also concerned about food insecurity. The violence has caused the abandonment of agricultural lands and the loss of harvests, exposing girls and boys to malnutrition. The economic situation of the country is unstable. We therefore deplore the reduction of financial support from the international community for such necessary humanitarian assistance.

We believe that it is imperative that the United Nations, through its agencies and in cooperation with the Government, the African Union and other humanitarian agencies and sources of cooperation, work on a long-term strategy that addresses the root causes of the crisis and envisages the possibility of a sustainable peace. Among other measures for sustainable development, that includes improving governance in agriculture and supporting development and rural employment. In that regard, we welcome the convening of a high-level humanitarian conference at the initiative of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates and the Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations of the European Commission.

Mr. Tumysh (Kazakhstan): We thank Under-Secretary-General Lowcock for his briefing. We would like to commend the recent visit of Mrs. Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, with Under-Secretary-General Lowcock, to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and their drawing of international attention to the urgent humanitarian situation in that country. We also welcome the briefers of this meeting — Coordinator Bahati and Secretary-General Nshole.

We join others in expressing our deep concern about the dire humanitarian situation in the Democratic

Republic of the Congo, which is aggravated by the increasing violence, armed conflicts, poverty, malnutrition, drought, forced internal displacements and refugee flows.

We note the importance of the joint initiative of the United Nations, the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates and the European Union to host the first-ever high-level humanitarian conference on the Democratic Republic of the Congo, to be held in Geneva on 13 April. We call on donors for greater support in order to respond to the needs of more than 13 million Congolese people.

The politically fragile and insecure situation heightens the existing crisis. It is therefore causing a vicious cycle of conflict and humanitarian tragedy, with one triggering the other. We therefore call for a political resolution of the crisis, adherence to the Constitution and the holding of timely, free, fair and credible elections, which could lead to stabilization and the gradual building of State institutions. The international community must support the Democratic Republic of the Congo in laying the foundations for good governance, the rule of law and reform of the security, law enforcement and judiciary sectors. The Government needs to encourage women and young people to participate in those processes.

Food security is also severely affected by the ongoing armed conflict, forcing farmers to flee and to miss the planting seasons. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, UNICEF and the World Food Programme, only 400,000 of the 3.2 million severely food insecure people in Kasai received assistance in December last year.

Women and children are the most vulnerable category of the country's population, leaving their homes to escape the horrific inter-ethnic violence and sexual abuse and, as a result, being exposed to difficult living conditions. With humanitarian needs having doubled since last year, more than 4.6 million Congolese children are acutely malnourished, including 2.2 million severe acute cases. Moreover, epidemics are spreading, making for the worst outbreak of cholera in 15 years.

Gender equality in all stabilization and development processes is important. The role of women in the political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo cannot be overestimated. The broad participation of women in the upcoming elections and further nation-building measures should therefore be

encouraged. Women activists, organizations and civil society networks must be guaranteed security.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has a central role to play in ensuring that protection is mainstreamed across the humanitarian action. The caseloads of refugees, returnees, internally displaced persons and host communities are large and diverse. UNHCR therefore requires adequate funding for its life-saving work.

We need to address the crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo by looking at it through the prism of innovative strategy, as it influences the entire region and its causes and repercussions are interconnected with similar challenges in neighbouring states. Accordingly, we encourage all international and regional partners to actively engage in addressing the crisis through a revamped regional approach. The security track is closely interlinked with development through a range of multifaceted, mutually reinforcing factors. Investments in development are therefore critical as they validate the often-demonstrated formula of strengthening the security-development nexus, which is a key path to achieving sustainable peace in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the wider region. We also commend the tireless efforts of humanitarian organizations and their personnel on the ground, while selflessly risking their own lives for the sake of saving others.

We call on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to facilitate and ensure safe and unhindered humanitarian access across the country. The role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is absolutely strategic and must reinforce operational and cost effectiveness, thereby contributing to filling gaps, together with other actors, especially with Government and international development stakeholders. We are convinced that all United Nations agencies should deliver as one United Nations in providing assistance in a more coordinated, transparent and efficient manner. We also emphasize the crucial role of confidence-building measures, as mentioned by the Permanent Representative of Kuwait.

Lastly, every human life is sacred, and people are the main asset and resource of any nation. The international community should make every effort in addressing the suffering of the Congolese people in a spirit of solidarity and sense of unity inspired by the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations.

Mr. Skoog (Sweden): I thank you, Sir, for convening this meeting and your country and Minister's engagement.

Throughout its turbulent history, the Democratic Republic of the Congo has seldom been far from the Council's agenda. Likewise, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is always present when our colleagues in Geneva discuss humanitarian needs and appeals. For that reason, it is easy to dismiss the latest crisis as business as usual. However, as we have heard today, we clearly cannot. The current crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is catastrophic in scale. Civilians, particularly women and children, are bearing the brunt. It is a man-made disaster. Surging levels of violence fuelled by political instability and uncertainty are leading to forced displacements, coupled with sexual and gender-based violence, human rights abuses and violations of international humanitarian law — all of which are driving the humanitarian crisis. The trends and increasing rate in humanitarian needs are shocking and unprecedented. The Democratic Republic of the Congo is facing its worst humanitarian crisis in modern times.

We therefore welcome the initiative of the presidency and the Emergency Relief Coordinator to bring the humanitarian situation in the country to the attention of the Security Council. I also thank Ms. Jeanine Bandu Bahati and Abbé Nshole for their sobering briefings before the Council today. Let me also take this opportunity to acknowledge the presence of the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We look forward to hearing him later. Sweden fully supports the work of Mr. Lowcock, the United Nations and partners on the ground. As we have heard, the challenge is great, and it must be urgently addressed. Our response must be swift and, as Abbé Nshole said, correspond to the scale of the challenge. I will outline four areas that should be the focus of our efforts.

First, responding to immediate humanitarian needs will require a surge in funding. We welcome the upcoming high-level donor conference and hope that it will generate generous, reliable and flexible funding, as well draw attention to the situation in the country. Sweden will continue to provide significant and increasing humanitarian support to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to meet increasing needs. Our contribution for 2018 is already \$28 million. It is important that we all play our part. In such a complex

context, the need for an integrated approach that addresses the nexus linking humanitarian, development, human rights and peace and security is clear. In its support for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sweden has aligned its humanitarian and development support. We encourage others to do the same.

Full, safe and immediate humanitarian access for all those who are doing what they can with extremely limited funding and facing serious challenges must be ensured. The Government has a particular responsibility in that regard. We welcome the agreement between the United Nations and the Governor of Tanganyika on an enabling environment for humanitarian action. The security of humanitarian personnel is an essential element of access. Cooperation with the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) to guarantee safe passage to affected populations is critical.

Last week, we commemorated the one-year anniversary of the deaths of Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp, who were murdered. It was a sad reminder about the lack of accountability involving their deaths and how the security of United Nations personnel needs to be enhanced.

Secondly, we must simultaneously step up efforts to protect civilians who are increasingly at risk. The roots of the violence are complex, but the Government must shoulder its primary responsibility vis-à-vis the population to stop the surging violence and promote peaceful conflict resolution. In addition, MONUSCO must be properly equipped to effectively protect civilians.

Thirdly, in order to foster long-term stability and peace, the holding of credible, transparent, inclusive and peaceful elections on 23 December, with the ensuing democratic transfer of power in accordance with the Constitution and the 31 December agreement is imperative. That is something we must all support, including local and regional actors, with whom close cooperation continues to be essential. What happens in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has broader consequences and risks jeopardizing the stability not only of that country but of the Great Lakes region. Measures to ensure women's full and effective participation in the elections are critical so that all sectors of Congolese society can play their full part in

the democratic process. As Ms. Bahati just said, women and girls must be accorded significantly more influence in every aspect of decision-making. That requires political space. It is important that freedom of speech and assembly be reasserted. In that regard, we welcome the recommendation from the Government commission of inquiry into the security forces' actions in response to peaceful protests to lift the ban on demonstrations.

Lastly, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as elsewhere, the root causes of the conflict must be addressed if the country is to break free from a vicious cycle of poverty, insecurity and violence. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offers a framework to curb the chronic vulnerability of many Congolese. The Government together with the assistance of the whole of the United Nations, as well as other parts of the international community, must now work together to make progress in alleviating poverty, ending inequality and creating a society in which all Congolese look to the future not with despair but hope. That will require an investment from the Government, including through increased mining revenues channelled towards the good of the people. On the part of the international community, there needs to be a comprehensive, integrated and resourced plan for sustained peace.

Mr. Green (United States of America): I thank Ambassador Haley for inviting me here, and the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Ambassador Van Oosterom for convening this briefing.

America sees the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo as an urgent priority for several reasons. The first is fiscal. Many hundreds of millions of dollars have been generously provided to alleviate suffering and foster economic development, but they are being robbed of their full value by crisis, conflict and poor governance. Last year alone, America's foreign assistance to the Democratic Republic of the Congo exceeded \$546 million. Our humanitarian contributions totalled more than \$209 million. The agency that I am privileged to lead — the United States Agency for International Development — contributed more than \$130 million-worth of food assistance and more than \$130 million for health programmes. Our taxpayers generously offered that assistance to help ease the immediate suffering, as well as lay a foundation for the eventual development journey to self reliance to which every people aspires. Yet disaster — not natural disaster like an earthquake or drought, but man-

made disaster in the form of inhumane, authoritarian governance — is destroying any chance that those purposes will be met.

The second reason for giving high priority to this crisis is that it is not solely a crisis of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is an international crisis. Brutal policies, sweeping corruption, poor governance and simmering conflict have displaced millions — 4.5 million internally — and hundreds of thousands have fled into neighbouring countries, imposing new burdens and risking regional instability.

Thirdly, and most importantly, like all Council members, the United States cares about this crisis because of the breathtaking human suffering it has inflicted. Some 43 per cent of children are chronically malnourished, over 57 per cent of women have experienced physical or sexual violence, and the maternal mortality rate is among the world's highest. The messages we just heard from Mr. Lowcock, Ms. Bandu Bahati and Abbé Nshole are heart-rending.

Now, some will argue that the challenges facing the Democratic Republic of the Congo are too complex and too deeply ingrained for lasting solutions anytime soon. But that does not excuse us from our responsibility to act or from our responsibility to force steps in a new direction. We may not have all the answers, but we do know what is not working — the status quo.

On 18 January, the United Nations launched its 2018 humanitarian response plan, requesting nearly \$1.7 billion to assist the country's most vulnerable. It is the largest such appeal to date because the level of suffering is the greatest seen in many years, and all of us should be ready to respond, but none of us should believe that merely expanding humanitarian assistance is actually addressing the country's greatest needs or its principal causes of suffering. Boosting assistance without also insisting upon concrete measurable action from the Kabila Government is the opposite of compassion. In some ways, it would make us all part of the problem. We respectfully suggest the following.

First, we must demand that credible elections take place this calendar year. Ambassador Haley has made clear that United States support for the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not inevitable, unlimited or unconditional. It will be sharply re-evaluated if the elections currently scheduled for December are delayed yet again. Like many others, we have lost patience with the excuses that have been offered. They are

increasingly disingenuous. To be clear, these elections need not be technologically “state of the art”. Some of the most important votes of our time have relied on purple fingers and simple paper ballots. Countries with challenges as great and circumstances as difficult as those of the Democratic Republic of the Congo have held credible elections and lifted their futures. The Democratic Republic of the Congo must do the same, or else we must rethink our support and our approach.

Secondly, we should demand that the Government foster the conditions that make true democracy possible. It must take immediate steps to make clear that citizens will be free to express their will and choose their own future. It could act this very day to protect the fundamental rights of speech and assembly. It could begin restoring basic services and rule of law this week. Instead of protecting its people from harm, which is the primary responsibility of any Government, the Kabila Government has actually been implicated in over 60 per cent of the nearly 7,000 human rights violations reported in the last year.

Thirdly, an unshakable demand for the continuation of assistance must be the safety of the courageous humanitarian workers labouring under the most trying of circumstances. Last year, there were 158 reported security incidents targeting humanitarian workers — kidnapping, road ambushes, robberies, and so forth. Two United Nations experts — one of them American — were abducted and killed. There is no excuse for this savagery or the failure of the Government to prevent it.

Fourthly, the United States believes that other countries must step forward and also do more to help. To be clear, we are proud of the leadership role we play as a humanitarian donor, but given all the needs in so many parts of the world, we expect others to come forward and do their part too. An international crisis requires an international response. This demand begins with the Government itself. It has done so little to alleviate suffering, even as many of its leaders have apparently been lining their own pockets. According to the Congo Research Group, the Kabila family owns either partially or wholly more than 80 of the country’s largest businesses and more than 450 miles of diamond concessions. At the same time, 27 per cent of primary age children miss school because their parents cannot afford the fees.

We make these demands because they will offer the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo their first real hope of a brighter future. We each represent humane, compassionate people, but true compassion requires more than providing money. It requires us to use our collective influence to demand concrete actions that will end cycles of misery. The crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is hopeless only if we do nothing. These are steps we can take, beginning with the demands we can make as donors. We can insist upon timely elections, demand the freedoms that make those elections credible, require protection for brave humanitarian workers and ensure that everyone does his or her part to ease citizen suffering, especially the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo itself.

Mr. Tanoh-Boutchoue (Côte d’Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): My delegation welcomes the initiative taken by Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, to organize a visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo in order to learn about the humanitarian situation on the ground. We also thank Mr. Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, who also recently visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for his briefing on the humanitarian situation in the country. Finally, the Ivorian delegation thanks Ms. Jeanine Bandu Bahati and Abbé Donatien Nshole for their poignant and informative contributions on the experience of the populations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It welcomes the presence of the Permanent Representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo at today’s meeting.

Côte d’Ivoire remains concerned about the serious humanitarian crisis being experienced by its sister republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, because, in addition to the tragic briefings we have just heard on the situation in the country, according to the latest report of the Secretary-General (S/2018/174) on the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), there are at least 13 million people, including 4.5 million internally displaced persons and 670,000 refugees in neighbouring countries, in particular Burundi, Tanzania, Uganda, Angola and Zambia, in need of urgent humanitarian assistance and protection. The report also indicates that 7.7 million people suffer from severe food insecurity and that more

than 2 million children are acutely malnourished, all of whom require urgent assistance.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is also experiencing a major cholera crisis, with nearly 3,000 suspected cases reported. These figures call on us not only to respond urgently to the continuing deterioration of the security situation, but also to take into account the necessary support of the international community for the efforts of the Congolese authorities.

Côte d'Ivoire believes that it is important to combat the insecurity prevailing in the country, caused by attacks by armed groups against civilian populations and by clashes among these groups. These attacks are the main cause of forced displacement and mass exodus of populations to neighbouring countries. Similarly, the humanitarian crisis situation in the country has been made more complex by inter-ethnic conflicts and intercommunity violence in some of the country's provinces, fuelled by traditional rivalries between communities and the difficulties of gaining access to or delivery of humanitarian assistance.

In view of the scale of the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, we must act without delay to provide for the basic needs of the populations on the ground, which, according to the United Nations, have grown twofold since the end of last year and are estimated to be \$1.7 billion for this year. In that regard, Côte D'Ivoire calls on the international community to support the efforts of the Congolese authorities and local non-governmental organizations by increasing assistance to displaced persons and refugees and by strengthening actions to improve the security situation in the country.

My country appreciates the efforts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's neighbouring States that are hosting the flow of refugees, and encourages them, in collaboration with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, to create conditions conducive to a voluntary and safe return to the countries of origin.

My delegation welcomes the work undertaken by international humanitarian organizations in a complex and difficult environment, and invites them to maintain their valuable support for refugees and internally displaced persons, with special emphasis on women and children, who are most vulnerable in conflict situations. Côte D'Ivoire also encourages States signatories to the Framework Agreement for Peace,

Security and Cooperation for the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Region to put an end to the recurring cycles of conflict that fuel the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and jeopardize the stability and development not only of that country but of the entire Great Lakes region.

In conclusion, my delegation stresses the importance of mobilizing the resources necessary to remediate the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and to that end encourages the international community and all bilateral and multilateral partners to increase their support not only to the Government of that country, but also to the implementation of the mandate of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It invites the donor community and funding partners to take active part in the very first high-level international humanitarian conference for the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which will be organized by the United Nations, the European Union and the United Arab Emirates on 13 April as part of a rapid and adequate response to the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Mark Lowcock; Abbé Donatien Nshole, Secretary-General of the Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo; and Ms. Jeanine Bandu Bahati, Coordinator of the Encadrement des Femmes Indigenes et des Ménages Vulnérables, whose briefings illustrate and help us to better understand the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We also express our gratitude to the Netherlands for having undertaken the initiative to hear these briefings in order to focus the attention of the members of the Council on the humanitarian situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are among Equatorial Guinea's priorities during its membership of the Security Council. We are resolutely committed to supporting and playing a constructive role in the peace process in that sister country of Central Africa, the Great Lakes region and southern Africa.

The full normalization of the political situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo will be complicated if the data on the humanitarian situation

remain so devastating. The number of internally displaced persons now exceeds 4.5 million — the highest number in all of Africa. More than 13 million people depend on humanitarian aid to survive, while more than 7 million live in severe food insecurity and more than 2 million children are malnourished. These figures are very alarming and should attract the attention of the international community with a view to providing urgent humanitarian aid. Failure to do so will have even more catastrophic consequences. The cases of human rights violations and abuses are still alarmingly high. Most cases remain unpunished, while their perpetrators campaign freely with a high probability of repeating their offenses. The upsurge in violence in Ituri province contributes greatly to the deterioration of the situation. The authors of these horrendous crimes must face justice.

Although there has been some progress, the security situation in the country still presents some challenges. The achievement of lasting peace, prosperity and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains an arduous task and has a long way to go. That is an important aspect in remediating the deteriorated humanitarian situation. It therefore needs the continued support of the international community, especially in financing the activities of humanitarian organizations.

The Republic of Equatorial Guinea insists on the guaranteed implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework for the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Region, formulated on 24 February 2013 in Addis Ababa, and that its signatories and guarantors take the necessary steps to ensure its effective implementation, to which the neutralization of the armed groups that operate in the east of the country is critical.

In accordance with the conclusions of the thirtieth ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union of Addis Ababa in January, and the communiqué issued following the tripartite meeting, held in Kinshasa between Presidents Denis Sassou Nguesso of the Congo, João Lourenço of Angola and Joseph Kabila Kabange of the Democratic Republic of the Congo on 14 February, Equatorial Guinea welcomes the progress that has been registered in the political process in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with the commitment of President Kabila and the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to complying with the electoral calendar established on 5 November 2017 and the agreement

of 31 December 2016. The progress made by the Independent National Electoral Commission in registering voters and acquiring voting machines are steps in the right direction.

Equatorial Guinea reiterates once again its appeal to both the Government and the main opposition parties to resolve their differences through frank and inclusive dialogue and to pool their efforts to achieve peace, stability and development in the country. The international community must provide constructive assistance to those efforts and the path freely chosen by the Congolese, while the sovereignty of the country must always be respected. The countries of the region — which we commend for their solidarity — must also contribute to these efforts.

The important role played by the African Union, alongside the United Nations and the European Union, must be supported by the work of such regional and subregional organizations as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Economic Community of Central African States, the Southern African Development Community to achieve better coordination.

In conclusion, I should like once again to underscore the important work being done by the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo for peace, security and stability in that sister country. We encourage it to spare no effort at this time of great challenges leading up to the elections scheduled for 23 December. In that regard, the Republic of Equatorial Guinea unreservedly supports the renewal of the Mission's mandate.

Mr. Allen (United Kingdom): I thank our briefers for their clear and detailed accounts. They have set out why there has been such a rapid increase in humanitarian needs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As Under-Secretary-General Lowcock reported, the number of people in need of aid in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has doubled in the past year. Today 13.1 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance — the same number as in Syria. The United Nations has declared the worst level of humanitarian crisis — level 3 — in certain provinces, putting the Democratic Republic of the Congo alongside only Yemen, Syria and Iraq. Yet it is often absent from our screens and daily briefings. We must not let it fall further down our agenda.

We are extremely concerned about the impact of the crisis on the most vulnerable, especially women and girls, the disabled and children. The United Nations Joint Human Rights Office reported that there was a 53 per cent increase in the number of victims of sexual violence in 2017.

I thank the representative of the *Encadrement des Femmes Indigènes et des Ménages Vulnérables* for her powerful testimony. Hope is a woman from Masisi, in the east of the country, where 90 per cent of women have been raped. Four men in military uniforms raped her as she collected firewood for her family. The attack left her pregnant and HIV-positive. She has since fled to a temporary camp in Goma and can no longer feed her eight children. They rely on humanitarian aid, like 8 million other Congolese children. Two million children currently face starvation.

Hope is one of 4.5 million internally displaced people in the Democratic Republic of the Congo — the highest number in Africa. More than 2 million people have been displaced in the past year alone. Just in the past year, the number of people displaced in the Democratic Republic of the Congo matched the total number of internally displaced persons in South Sudan. There are an additional 740,000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo in neighbouring countries as a result of ongoing hostilities.

International support is vital to address the crisis, and the United Kingdom will continue to play a key role. We have committed to spending \$285 million on humanitarian aid between 2017 and 2020. That support will provide more than 3 million people with life-saving assistance, including food, clean drinking water and essential health care. To improve the challenging and limited access for humanitarian actors, the support of the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is crucial. While we welcome the commitments made to facilitate the work of humanitarian organizations and reduce tariffs for humanitarian imports, including medicines and food, this Council and the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must see concrete and sustained action.

In particular, we urge the Government to take the following three steps. First, it should improve the administrative and financial registration procedures required for international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to operate lawfully in the country, through consultations with NGOs themselves.

Secondly, it should reduce the bureaucracy for humanitarian workers to obtain visas and for essential relief items to be cleared at customs. Finally, it needs to ensure that security across the country is maintained so that humanitarian organizations have sufficient access to those most in need.

The upcoming donor conference on 13 April is an opportunity for the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to demonstrate the progress they have made on commitments to facilitate the improvement of the humanitarian situation. It is also an opportunity for the international community to pledge our support to the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and to show them that the world remembers Africa's forgotten crisis.

Let me be clear — humanitarian aid will provide only temporary relief in this crisis. The key root cause is political instability, which drives the deteriorating security and humanitarian situations. Too often peaceful protesters are met with violence for speaking out about their political rights, in violation of their human rights. A number of people have been killed in church-led protests this year, which we must all condemn. Free, fair and transparent elections must be held on 23 December. With an estimated 46 million voters spread across the world's eleventh largest country, that is no easy task. For the elections to be successful, the right conditions need to be created now.

The international community must remain focused and united in our support for the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We must remain united in our expectations of its Government and in our insistence on accountability and progress. We in the Security Council need to work with the region and subregion to do so.

Finally, it is with great sadness that we remember the horrific, tragic murders of United Nations experts Zaida Catalán and Michael Sharp, killed just over one year ago in the Kasai region. The Council must continue to push for accountability for their deaths. We call on the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure that the investigation is thorough and transparent and that all those responsible are held to account. We should have a full update on the progress on that investigation soon.

Mr. Inchauste Jordán (Plurinational State of Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Mark Lowcock,

for his briefing and commend him on his visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo last week. We also thank the Coordinator of the Encadrement des Femmes Indigènes et des Ménages Vulnérables, Ms. Jeanine Bandu Bahati, and the Secretary-General of the Conférence Episcopale Nationale du Congo, Abbé Donatien Nshole, for their briefings.

The most recent report of the Secretary-General paints a bleak picture of the security and humanitarian situations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and provides a comprehensive overview of ceaseless violence, including disputes over natural resources, clashes among armed groups and between communities, and inter-ethnic violence. Bolivia firmly condemns all violence, including that during the protests in December and January. But above all, we are concerned about the threat of armed groups in various parts of the country, as they are primarily responsible for the deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

We also condemn all acts to exacerbate tensions and incite violence and all acts of sexual exploitation and sexual violence. We believe that all such allegations must be investigated, including those reported to involve possible participation of the national police or the armed forces. In that regard, we laud the culmination, on 13 December, of the trial concerning the rape of 38 girls, in which 12 of the accused were sentenced to life in prison. It is an important step in the fight against impunity, which should continue. The perpetrators of that type of crime must be investigated, brought to justice and sentenced by the relevant courts.

Regrettably, the consequences of violent acts committed chiefly by armed groups in the Democratic Republic of the Congo have reached catastrophic levels. Nearly 4.5 million people have been internally displaced, including about 900,000 women and more than 2 million boys and girls last year. Similarly, in recent years, more than 680,000 Congolese have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, including 100,000 in 2017. Approximately 8 million people face severe food insecurity, which is an increase of 30 per cent relative to the same period the previous year. It is estimated that 13 million people are in need of protection and humanitarian assistance this year — an increase of 50 per cent relative to last year. Special attention must be paid to this situation, particularly in the Kasai region, Tanganyika and South Kivu, which has been classified as a level 3 emergency, the highest level, according to the Emergency Relief Coordinator.

As a result of this deplorable humanitarian crisis, the budget for the humanitarian response plan has doubled to more than \$1.6 billion for this year, only 4.3 per cent of which has been raised so far. In that regard, we commend the joint work of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the United Arab Emirates and the European Union Commission in organizing a high-level humanitarian conference, to be held on 13 April, in order to mobilize funds and respond to the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We urge the international community to continue cooperating in order to ensure that the plan can rely on sustainable financing.

We call on all the parties to the conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to ensure unrestricted access for humanitarian assistance. We commend the work of the military and civilian personnel of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) and the personnel of the humanitarian agencies, who, despite a climate of insecurity and violence, risk their lives on a daily basis in order to relieve the suffering of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

We would like to call on the parties to work to ease tensions and comply with the agreement of 31 December 2016 by implementing its confidence-building measures in order to hold credible and inclusive elections in an effective and timely manner, bearing in mind that the equal participation of women is fundamental to all phases of the process.

Lastly, we believe it is important to think about the current needs of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. MONUSCO and its regional and subregional partners must work together and in coordination in order to address the root causes of the conflict, particularly the illegal exploitation of natural resources. The principles of preventive diplomacy and good offices should not be forgotten in the efforts to achieve a negotiated political solution, since it is the Congolese people and their institutions who should take the decisions on the future of their country. We support their decisions with regard to their sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity, with a view to achieving peace, stability and development in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The President: I shall now speak in my capacity as the representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

More than 6,000 people live in Katanika camp, in eastern Congo. My Foreign Trade Minister Sigrid Kaag visited the camp with Under-Secretary-General Lowcock last week. There she met a woman whom I will call Françoise. Françoise had lost her husband and child in a militia raid. Ms. Kaag was deeply touched by her ordeal. It is women like Françoise who continue to bear the brunt of this crisis. It is for women like Françoise that we come together here. Today, I will highlight three points. The first is the need to step up our immediate response; the second, to address the root causes of the crisis; and third, to intensify engagement with the region.

My first point concerns the importance of an immediate response. More than 13 million Congolese are in need. That number has doubled over the past two years. More than 2 million children are severely and acutely malnourished. They cannot be forgotten. They need our help. We are also concerned about increasing attacks on humanitarian workers. The security situation directly affects humanitarian access. The Congolese authorities and the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) must protect humanitarian actors against kidnappings and attacks on their assets. This month, we have the chance to give MONUSCO the mandate and the means it needs to be able to prevent escalation. The Security Council must increase its efforts, and we should discuss this situation more frequently. The Kingdom of the Netherlands therefore strongly supports organizing a Security Council visit this year. We must act now to prevent further escalation. The situation in Ituri in particular has our full attention.

My second point is that we must address the root causes of this man-made crisis. The escalation that has occurred since 2016 is directly linked to the political crisis. The people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo must regain hope and trust in their country. A renewed commitment to the New Year's agreement by all parties is therefore urgently needed. Despite some progress, the conditions conducive to credible elections are not there yet. In the current circumstances, hundreds of thousands of people will not be able to fully participate in the elections simply because they are too scared, because they are on the run from widespread and unpunished human rights violations, or because they are women — women like Françoise. Without women's meaningful participation in the elections, nationally, provincially and locally, there will be no

peace. We call on the Congolese authorities to ensure women's participation in the electoral law. All political actors must increase their efforts to engage women in the elections.

Thirdly, I want to discuss the role of the region. The crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo has long ceased to be merely a Congolese issue, if it ever was. It is the largest displacement crisis in Africa, and it has direct consequences for the region. The peaceful involvement of regional stakeholders is essential to a sustainable solution. The Kingdom of the Netherlands commends the efforts of the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, the Southern African Development Community and individual Member States to find a peaceful solution. We call on them to increase their efforts, as we call on the Council to increase its efforts. We welcome the presence today of so many representatives of the Democratic Republic of the Congo's neighbours and other countries in the region.

In conclusion, as our briefers have highlighted, only the concerted efforts of the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and their neighbours and regional and international partners can make a definitive difference for good. The relevant humanitarian partners require \$1.7 billion this year alone, as Mr. Lowcock explained earlier. On 13 April, therefore, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, together with the United Nations, the European Commission and the United Arab Emirates, will organize the first ever humanitarian donor conference for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It will take place in Geneva. Only a concerted effort will enable the mobilization of sufficient humanitarian relief. We hope that all States Members of the United Nations will support that humanitarian conference. We must work together, all of us, for the people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and for people like Françoise.

I now resume my functions as President of the Security Council.

I would like to once again remind all speakers to limit their statements to no more than five minutes in order to enable the Council to carry out its work expeditiously.

I give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Gata Mavita Wa Lufuta (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): I would first like to convey the apologies of Mr. Bernard Biando Sango, Minister of Solidarity and Humanitarian Action of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He will be arriving in New York a little late today and will not be able to attend today's meeting despite his efforts. He has asked me to assure Council members of his solidarity and wish us success in our work.

Before I deliver my statement, my delegation would like to thank you, Mr. President, for taking the initiative to organize this meeting on the humanitarian situation in my country. We are also grateful to Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Minister for Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation of the Netherlands, and Mr. Mark Lowcock, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, who visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo together in order to see for themselves the humanitarian situation on the ground.

In the absence of Mr. Biando Sango, who would have briefed Council members in detail on the situation, I will keep my statement short. The fact is that my country has been dealing with a humanitarian crisis affecting thousands of people for more than two decades. This situation is the result of recurring armed conflicts, mainly in eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo and neighbouring countries, natural disasters and other calamities, as well as various epidemics.

With regard to armed conflicts, it is the continuing insecurity resulting from the activity of domestic and foreign armed groups in the eastern part of the country that is at the root of the massive and ongoing displacement of formerly settled populations, who lived mainly as farmers and livestock herders. There is a similar situation in the greater Kasai area, where there have been clashes with the traditional chief Kamuina Nsapu's militia; in Tanganyika province, with the conflict between Bantu and Pygmies; and currently in Ituri, with the armed groups operating in that part of the country. At the same time, the conflicts in neighbouring countries such as the Central African Republic, South Sudan and Burundi have caused an influx of refugees from those countries, not to mention those who preceded them at an earlier period from other neighbours such as Rwanda and Uganda, following armed conflicts and political disagreements among the Governments in power in those countries, as was the case with the Allied Democratic Forces, the

Lord's Resistance Army and the Forces démocratiques de libération du Rwanda.

This situation of armed conflict has been compounded by natural disasters — torrential rains, floods and landslides — and the resurgence of some previously eradicated epidemic diseases, not to mention food insecurity, which we should point out is mainly due to a poor farming season resulting in lower crop yields and a shortfall in maize production.

Despite the Government's efforts to restore peace in areas affected by armed conflict, the humanitarian consequences are still enormous. We are working to come up with solutions. It goes without saying that any contribution on the part of the international community to help us address the situation is very welcome. In that regard, I should point out that my country continues to benefit from international solidarity efforts. A number of donors, United Nations agencies and international and national humanitarian organizations continue to support us in helping our vulnerable members of society.

As I said, my Government welcomed Ms. Kaag and Mr. Lowcock's visit to the Democratic Republic of the Congo and appreciated their discussions with Government authorities. During their delegation's high-level meeting with the Government, led by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Transport and Communications, standing in for the Prime Minister, it was agreed that the classification of my country's situation as a humanitarian emergency, which the Government considers excessive, would be revisited. While we recognize that we are dealing with emergency situations, they in no way warrant a designation as exaggerated as the international community claims. We hope that the Council will take my Government's position on the issue into consideration.

With that in mind, and with a view to harmonizing the views on this issue, before the conference to be held in Geneva we have therefore decided to convene a meeting of our national framework for consultation on humanitarian action, the State body responsible for coordinating our humanitarian response, which is also a forum for dialogue where humanitarian actors can exchange information and take independent decisions with a view to reaching a common understanding on the conduct of humanitarian affairs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

While the intervention of the Government and the international community is providing an effective and

lasting solution to the humanitarian crisis in the parts of my country affected by natural disasters, calamities and epidemics, we do not believe that the same is true in the areas where armed groups are operating. The Council will agree with us that if we cannot eradicate all the negative forces operating there, it will be difficult if not impossible to put an end to the situation. That is why my Government, which is committed to peace throughout our territory, is relentlessly and resolutely pursuing its efforts to completely neutralize and eradicate all of these forces. Although our efforts are already supported by the United Nations, through the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which already has a robust mandate for that from the Council, we believe that beyond the solutions my Government has proposed and the contributions expected from the international

community, it would also be helpful to consider, as one of the possible solutions to the problems underlying the worrying humanitarian situation, particularly with regard to the foreign armed groups, a political dialogue between those groups and their countries of origin, especially in view of the results achieved so far.

I should not conclude without once again emphasizing the significant and invaluable contributions made by the financial sponsors and donors in responding to our humanitarian needs in order to help the vulnerable people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. My Government is truly grateful for their support. I would also like to thank you, Mr. President, and all the members of the Council for their consideration of the situation in my country.

The meeting rose at 12.15 p.m.